

Day of Remembrance

Past Memorial Days Honoring Nation's Defenders Demonstrated Love of Country And Thankfulness for Hardwon Freedom

THE climax of Spring, for those of us born around the turn of the century, was always Memorial Day.

On that day the young and the old gathered together to do honor to the defenders of our nation. We did not regard Memorial Day as the first Summer holiday, to be spent in trips to the mountains or the shore. We dressed in our best, and gathered in the heart of the city for a big parade, with bands playing and flags flying.

Then, as the ablebodied marched and the frail old men of the GAR rode in carriages, we all paraded to the town's cemeteries to decorate the graves of the soldiers with Spring flowers.

Each grave bore its own little metal marker and a tiny American flag waving in the Spring sunshine. After an early supper topped by garden rhubarb and home made cake, we took the trolley back again to Memorial services in one of the downtown churches.

Memorial Day is a product of the Civil War. After the Revolution there were many war anniversary celebrations. On Independence Day for several decades the veterans of the Revolution were specially honored. New York always observed Evacuation Day with parades and ceremonies at the Battery, in which descendants of Revolutionary soldiers participated. The first official setting apart of a day for honoring the soldiers and sailors of our country was in May, 1868, at the direction of General John B. Logan, commander-in-chief of the Grand Army of the Republic.

Pylons and banners highlighted Newark's 250th anniversary celebration for 1916 Memorial Day parade on Broad street.

BY MIRIAM STUDLEY

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FIRST called Decoration Day, as time went on the occasion received recognition from state legislators who saw to it that funds were appropriated for grave markers. State and local boards of education provided for exercises in the schools, and for participation of children in the outdoor celebrations.

The New Jersey Legislature as early as March, 1880 authorized cities to appropriate money for the celebration of decoration day, which they spelled with a small "d." To this day, a New Jersey statute provides that each county shall have a Superintendent of Soldiers' Burials to see that war veterans who die impoverished shall have a fitting burial, grave markers and recognition on Memorial Day. John Cash, the aptly-named auditor, serves in this capacity in Essex County.

Although General Logan was responsible for the institution of Memorial Day, he was not the first one to suggest the decoration of soldiers' graves with flowers. The custom is a European one that goes back to ancient Germany, and perhaps even centuries earlier. Even after the Civil War, the first record of the decoration of the veterans' graves is not in the North, but south of the Mason and Dixon line. General Logan's wife, on a drive around post-war Richmond, was impressed by the Confederate flags and flower-strewn graves in that city's cemeteries. She described it to her husband, then serving in Congress, and, as commander of the GAR, on May 5, 1868, he issued the order which initiated the nation-wide observance.

THREE years earlier, in early May, 1865, a similar decoration of Union soldiers graves had been started in Charleston, S. C. James Redpath, a northern newspaper correspondent, had remained in Charleston at the end of the war as city school superintendent. Particularly interested in Negro education, he was teaching a class of children when he suggested that they join him in decorating the graves of the men who had fought for their freedom. One little girl spoke up to say, "Le's all of us go an' get armfuls and armfuls of posies an

Robert A. McAllister of Irvington, who died in January, 1945, was last of Essex County's "boys in blue."

This is how Leslie's Illustrated Weekly depicted one of cemetery scenes on the first Memorial Day which followed General Logan's order of May 5, 1868.



Spanish War veterans (above) and doughboys of World War I (below) passing Hill street while parading on Broad street on Memorial Day of 1928.

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cycle races were scheduled at the Vailsburg track. Along the north Newark shore there was the annual regatta of the Passaic River Amateur Rowing Association; on Newark Bay the Passaic Yacht Club held its regatta. Trotting and pacing races were held at the Weequahic track. The East Side Gun Club held a shooting match at its Ferry street grounds.

The fact that Americans were fighting overseas at the turn of the century brought a more personal feeling into the Memorial Day celebrations in '98, '99 and 1900. About 3,400 men from Newark took part in the Spanish-American War and in the subsequent campaign against the Filipino insurrectionists. A tablet at Barringer High School honors Ralph Simonds, a graduate who was among the first American soldiers to be killed in the insurrection. The "Hiker" monument, erected in 1913, honors the Newark men who took part in the Spanish-American War.

But as early as May, 1901, thoughtful Americans were noting the difference in the feeling between the commemoration of Civil War heroes, and the celebrations of Spanish-American War victories. The sense of devotion to a great cause was lacking, its place taken by a sense of national self-interest. The people, aware of the increasing mechanization of war, missed the sense of being closely involved in it.

LOOKING backward to the years of World War I we return in memory to the enthusiasm with which our citizens threw themselves into the war effort. The celebration of Memorial Day in 1917, 1918 and 1919 was part of a continual series of parades and patriotic celebrations. In 1917, so large were the crowds at the Memorial Day parade, that the members of the Newark Motorcycle Association were delegated to assist local police in keeping order; they had al-

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ready become affiliated with the local civilian police reserve. That night the cyclists were off on their annual endurance run, 24 hours from Newark to Cape May.

Two days before Memorial Day in 1918, 1,290 boys from Essex County entrained for Camp Dix. A spontaneous demonstration by families and friends became a parade as the marching column of recruits was followed down Market street to the Pennsylvania Station. All Spring there had been a succession of service flag raisings at Newark factories. Red Cross and Liberty Loan parades were continually being held, most impressive being the War Savings Parade of June 15, when the marchers sang "There's a Long Long Trail," "Keep the Home Fires Burning" and "Over There!" On Memorial Day, the entire parade made a two-minute halt, in silent supplication for "victory and lasting peace."

The Victory Loan Parade of April 29, 1919, was followed closely by a holiday and parade on May 20 in honor of the returning soldiers of the 113th Infantry. On May 26 there was another demonstration as the public turned out to honor the 104th Engineers, parading past City Hall. On Memorial Day the "Boys of '61" paraded with the Spanish-American veterans, while the 312th Infantry marched into Broad street from the apex of Washington Park, just where the

COVER PHOTO

Victoria Optiz, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles L. Optiz of Westfield, holds flag high in memory of war dead as she sits atop war-relic cannon during visit to Fairview Cemetery in Westfield. Flag is a copy of the first national emblem with 13 stars representing the original states

volunteers had assembled in 1861 to march to the Chestnut street station on their way to the front. On the 75th anniversary of the end of the Civil War, in 1939, there were in Essex County only eight surviving Union veterans. All were over 90. Still, they rode, when they had the strength, in the Memorial Day parades, and, on other occasions, got together over the telephone, or in visits to each other's homes.

IN 1942 three surviving Essex County veterans were honorary grand marshals of the Memorial Day parade, but only one, George Raab, rode in the procession. He died in January, 1943. Henry Willis of Montclair died at 102 just a week before the holiday. George Day of Newark marched for 38 years in the parade in Hightstown, his birthplace. He, too, is gone.

By 1945, there was not a living veteran of the Civil War to march in Newark's parade. Robert A. McAlister of Irvington died at 97 in January of that year, and a service was held for him on Memorial Day by Rev. Edson R. Leach, chaplain of Marcus L. Ward post, Sons of Union Veterans. Only two other veterans of the Civil War survived in the state. Robert McCandless of Elizabeth was a patient at Lyons Hospital where he died in June, 1945, at the age of 99. William H. Perrine rode as honorary grand marshal in the Elizabeth Memorial Day parade, and died at Plainfield in December of that year, aged 100, last of New Jersey's "boys in blue."

In tribute to them, let us quote the words which Seth Boyden respectfully addressed to "Our Returned Soldiers" in his letter to the editor of The Daily Advertiser on June 10, 1864:

"Their memory is warm in our breast, and vocal as a festival; the archives of the nation will glow with their deeds while history has a page . . . Our country owes them a debt which I trust will not be dishonored."



Memorial Day, 1917—GAR veterans (above) rode in the parade, followed later by Essex Troop (lower left) on crowd-packed Broad street. BELOW: Marching columns, including Spanish War Veterans, passing the City Hall.

soldiers of all American wars. With the disabled veterans of the Civil War in the Soldiers Home at Kearny were the survivors of the earlier war with Mexico. In 1899, although most of the Mexican war survivors were too feeble to ride in the parade, one of them was present at the services in Peddie Memorial Church. Others who were honored had been in the Indian wars and the Texas ranger fights. Caleb Baldwin, nearly 100 years old, was invited to attend the services as the oldest man in Newark, and a representative of the Revolutionary Era.

By the turn of the century the celebration of Memorial Day had come to include many of the sporting events that have, so to speak, secularized it, and turned people's minds from the real significance of the occasion. The parade, and the decoration of graves were started early in the morning of May 30, 1899. At 10:30 people assembled for the annual Irvington-Milburn bicycle road race; in the early afternoon

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jes' hide the graves from sight." When the appointed day came, over 1,000 persons appeared to take part in the ceremony.

The next Spring, in 1866, the Grand Army of the Republic was organized, to bind together the Union veterans of the late war in a fraternal organization, to succor the widows and orphans, to assist disabled soldiers, and to inculcate in the American people a proper appreciation of the veterans' services to the country. General Logan, one of the founders of the GAR, was elected its third commander-in-chief in 1868. One of his earliest official acts was to issue the Decoration Day proclamation "to inaugurate the observance with the hope that it will be kept up from year to year, while a survivor of the war remains to honor the memory of his departed comrades."

Cities throughout the north seized upon General Logan's order and carried it out with enthusiasm. In Newark, by the third week in May, the plans were well formulated. They were announced in detail in both the Daily Advertiser and The Daily Journal, Republican and Democratic newspapers, respectively.

MAY 30, 1868, dawned bright, warm and clear in Newark. Plans had been completed the previous week by GAR posts 2 and 11 at special meetings called for the purpose.

Carriages and wagons had been offered by cemetery officers and by citizens like Governor Marcus L. Ward, Mayor Peddie, Charles Erb and James Boylan. "To the ladies of the city and vicinity" the committee had entrusted the securing of flowers and the decoration of the graves, a collection place for flowers being established in the Post Office.

By 1:30 P. M. all the city's flags were at half-mast. Presently citizens, veterans and school children began to assemble around Military Park, and at 3 o'clock the line of march was formed, with two bands, and a carriage full of disabled veterans from Kearny. The Home for Disabled Soldiers had been established there in 1865. It continued to shelter former Union soldiers until the end of 1931 when the frail survivors of the hundreds who had once lived there were transferred to the new state soldiers home at Menlo Park.

In the 1868 parade the carriage bearing the disabled veterans was preceded by a large group of soldiers and sailors in civilian dress, the German Veterans Association, a uniformed escort from the Veterans Regiment, and large wagons full of public school children.

Many other citizens of Newark, including Governor Ward, rode in the parade in their own carriages. Governor Ward must have had a full schedule, for he gave the oration of the day at a similar celebration in Evergreen Cemetery, Elizabeth. Last of all marched the blue-uniformed members of Lincoln Post No. 11, and Marcus Ward Post No. 2 of the GAR.

IN the traditional manner of many Newark parades, the procession formed on the east side of Military Park, near Centre street, circled the park, marched down Broad street, up Market street to South Orange avenue, and up the hill to Fairmount avenue and the cemetery.

Many women and children were already at the cemetery when the procession arrived, swelling the assemblage to about 2,000 people. Fairmount Cemetery had been chosen because here were buried a large number of soldiers who had died at the Marcus Ward Hospital at the foot of Centre street.

Prayers by the chaplain and a long address by Dr. Sanford B. Hunt preceded the decorating ceremonies. Some thought the reverent patriotism of the occasion was marred by Dr. Hunt's address which contained several political references. The Newark Daily Journal, the Democratic organ, commented sharply on this point, as was natural, for Dr. Hunt, a surgeon in the Union Army, was the editor of the rival paper, The Newark Daily Advertiser. Dr. Hunt was the father of William T. Hunt, and grandfather of William S. Hunt and Sanford B. Hunt, all of whom were editors of The Newark Sunday Call.

We are accustomed to think of the idea of honoring the unknown soldier as a relatively modern one, dating back only to World War I. The accounts in both The Newark Daily Advertiser and The Newark Daily Journal of Decoration Day in 1868 indicated that those participating were fully mindful of heroes buried in thousands of unmarked graves in the South.

AT some time during the next 30 years the celebration of Decoration Day came to include the recognition of the